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ABSTRACT

The School Community Involvement System (SCIS) is presented as a model community program that encourages educators, parents and community members to work together to meet the needs of children and society. This model is intended as a comprehensive systematic program for community involvement and communication in the school experience, as well as a guide for principals and faculties in developing or upgrading community involvement programs. The rationale for parent and community involvement in the schools is discussed, various levels of involvement are described, and parental rights to information and influence are explained. The goal of SCIS is described as the development of a true community school with three major components: (1) a community advisory council; (2) an involvement program (school-based); and (3) an involvement support system (community-based). Personnel needed and services provided by each component are detailed along with four alternative procedures for implementation of a SCIS program. (NRB)

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School - Community Involvement: A Human Interaction Approach

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School - Community Involvement:
A Human Interaction Approach

Community and parental involvement in the school experiences of youngsters has passed through an interesting evolution. Originally, definitions related to involvement were limited in their potential as compared with more recent conceptualizations. Since the administration of Gallup's (1971) opinionnaire, "Third Annual Survey of Public's Attitude toward the Schools," parent-community involvement in the school experience has exploded as a frontier. As interest in the phenomenon of parent-community involvement has increased, such involvement has assumed a multi-directional posture. Many different programs are functioning under the parent-community involvement banner. In a sound program of parent-community involvement, there is a range between activities that inform and activities that involve on a continuum from educational bystander to the educational decision making level. School-community involvement will include the three levels of psychological intervention presented by Goodyear (1976) and the targets, purposes and methods of intervention described by Morrill, Oetting and Hurst (1974).

For purposes of clarity, some distinction should be made between community and parent involvement, although both are integral components of a total involvement system. Community involvement encompasses a more comprehensive base of participation and responsibility than does a minutely focused parent involvement program. The school becomes a focal point for planning, not just an educational center in the narrow sense. Functionally, this means coordinating resources to meet specified needs of a particular community as opposed to establishing fragmented programs. Each community school becomes the coordinating source for the education community. This involves cooperative efforts and responsiblities reciprocally assumed by parents, teachers, counselors, students and community residents.

Since parents are members of the community it becomes somewhat difficult to delineate what differentiates community involvement from parental involvement. The major distinction between the two is that community involvement includes more populations and attends to more global concerns. Parental involvement is closer to the pulse beat of the local school experience (Shelton and Dobson, 1973).

The Why of Involvement

The term "community and parental involvement" falls into the category of easily verbalized phrases which meet with everyone's immediate approval. Often, little effort is devoted to analyzing what is meant by such a concept, and consequently, legitimate courses of action are not always established. In the final analysis, judgment must be based on effective collaboration between community residents, including parents and students, and the school in all decision-making processes.

There is considerable evidence that the public is discontent with services provided by their schools. Designed to educate all children, American public education appears to be at a crisis point in the minds and attitudes of the public.

Historically, uniformity in public schools was considered a guarantee to equal educational opportunity for all. However, the attempt to adjust a uniform educational process to a pluralistic society has resulted in the opposite. Fantini (1972) states, "Alienation, loss of cultural identity, human classification (slow, deprived, disadvantaged, with concomitant self-fulfilling prophecies), absenteeism, rebellion are often the results of uniformity in public education (p. 675). "

Proponents for parent-community involvement advance many arguments for the benefits of such interaction: more citizen participation in school elections (Gittell, 1968); increased sense of racial pride (Lauter, 1968); decline of truancy (Fantini, 1969), and when parents are directly involved in their youngsters' school experience, the tendency for student achievement levels to rise (Cohen, 1969; Shelton and Dobson, 1974). Some critics suggest that higher socio-economic status parents are more directly involved in school affairs and their children have higher achievement scores. They argue that socio-economic status, not the involvement, is the variable influencing the achievement. However, Schaefer (1971) reports that:

> The amount of parental involvement in the child's education may explain up to four times as much of the variance in the child's intelligence and achievement test scores at age eleven as the quality of the schools. Douglas, in a national sample of 5,000 children in England, found that parent interest and involvement with the child's education were far more important than the quality of schools, even after statistically controlling for family socio-economic status (p. 19).

Community Culture

There is no one model of parent-community involvement that will work in all communities. Many ventures in establishing community and parental involvement programs have fallen short of anticipated outcomes. School personnel, historically insensitive to their clientele, have not analyzed community culture (Dobson and Dobson, 1975). As a consequence, there have been multiple approaches to parent-community involvement. To the segregationists, parent-community involvement meant interaction with neighborhood schools while to the militants, it meant community control. To central administration, parent-community involvement was, in too many instances, a method for co-opting the parents. To higher education, parent-community involvement meant increased credit hours through evening classes. However, viable community and parental

involvement becomes a device through which community needs and school programs are matched. Initially, the responsibility for coordinating such a function probably lies withing the school.

Agger and Goldstein (1970) conclude that cultural class indicators are more powerful than SES in predicting basic attitudes of community and parents toward the public school system. They view SES as determined by formal education and view culture class as reflected by attitudes toward such things as fiscal expenditure, innovation and trust of school officials. Clark (1971) supports this position when he states that a "systematic classification of different types of values is an important step (p. 4)."

Olsen (1972) eloquently states that:

> Human community--a profound and effective sense of common unity--is the essence of any enduring free society. Without that fundamental public sense of shared basic values, of widespread community aspiration, no democratic framework is likely to survive for even another generation. If we are to continue as a free and culturally pluralist people, we must immediately find ways to build up the psychological basis for genuine community development--in family groups, in neighborhoods, in urban areas, in geographic regions, in the nation and in the larger world of human beings on this planet (p. 176).

Levels of Involvement

Gordon (1970) has identified five levels of parental involvement: (1) audience - bystander - observer; (2) teacher of the child; (3) volunteer (4) trained worker; and (5) participants in decision making, especially through advisory board membership.

Level one is typically what has occurred in school - home communication systems. Generally, this level is represented by parent groups such as PTAs, band clubs, quarterback clubs and open-house. Efforts of this nature often collapse or cause parents to assume a posture of passivity in school affairs.

Level two is related to a closed system (one-way communication) in that it makes parents aware of their educational responsibilities to their children. At this level, the focus is on assisting parents in their roles as teachers of their children.

Level three utilizes parents as volunteer aides engaging in activities from instruction to supervision. Parents may volunteer to teach a lesson on a trip they have taken, share a hobby with students, assist with supervision of a field trip or be used to free teachers for team meetings and planning sessions.

Level four involves parents as trained workers. The use of teacher aides in public school classrooms shows promise of becoming one of the most lasting and significant changes that the teaching profession has experienced over the years. A number of state departments of education have established guidelines spelling out the functions and training of these paraprofessionals in an attempt to guarantee the quality of adults who come into direct contact with students.

The fifth, and possibly the most threatening to many school personnel, is the involvement of parents at the decision-making level. Generally, the vehicle for involving parents at this level has been through the establishment of advisory boards.

Right to Involvement

Since adults play a vital role in the formation of each subsequent generation, an informed adult population appears to be a prerequisite to the attainment of a democratic society which both subscribes to and facilitates the realization that each human being should achieve his/her fullest potential (Dobson and Dobson, 1979). Fantini (1969) suggests that reform of schools is not likely without the support of parents, community residents, and students.

Rowell (1981, p. 441) states that "Parents have the fundamental human rights to know, to understand, and to share in decisions that affect the education of their children." He differentiates between parental rights to provide information and parental rights to influence. Under the parental rights to information Rowell includes: (1) the right to know about the teacher's and principal's professional background and experiences; (2) the right to be informed about official policies of a school or district relative to discipline, absences, dress etc.; and (3) the right to be informed about the curriculum i.e. how students are grouped for instruction, the content of courses and grading/evaluation procedures.

According to Rowell (1981) parents must also be contributors to or influencers of administrative decisions and school policy. He supports the parents rights to influence administrative decisions especially in regard to personnel review. He suggests, "Parents should be able to exert influence through proper channels on the administrative decision-making process as it involves teacher and principal evaluation (p. 442)." Fischer (1981) describes the use of parents in hiring school personnel.

The fifth right of parents, stated by Rowell, is the right to influence school policy through expressing concerns relative to curriculum, implementation of discipline policies, determination of program priorities in the schools, and budget considerations. Avenues of parent influence include advisory committees, parent forums and written evaluation tools. He encourages the creation of a feedback system by which parents and members of the community may be kept informed about the final decisions that are made.

Karnes, et. al. (1972) establish that any feasible model for parental involvement must follow a clearly delineated set of assumptions:

1. Family members will find the time to become involved if the involvement is meaningful.

2. Parents are easiest to involve when their goals and values are in agreement with those of the school, and most difficult when there is a great discrepancy in the match.

3. Parents will become involved to the extent to which they participate in decision making.

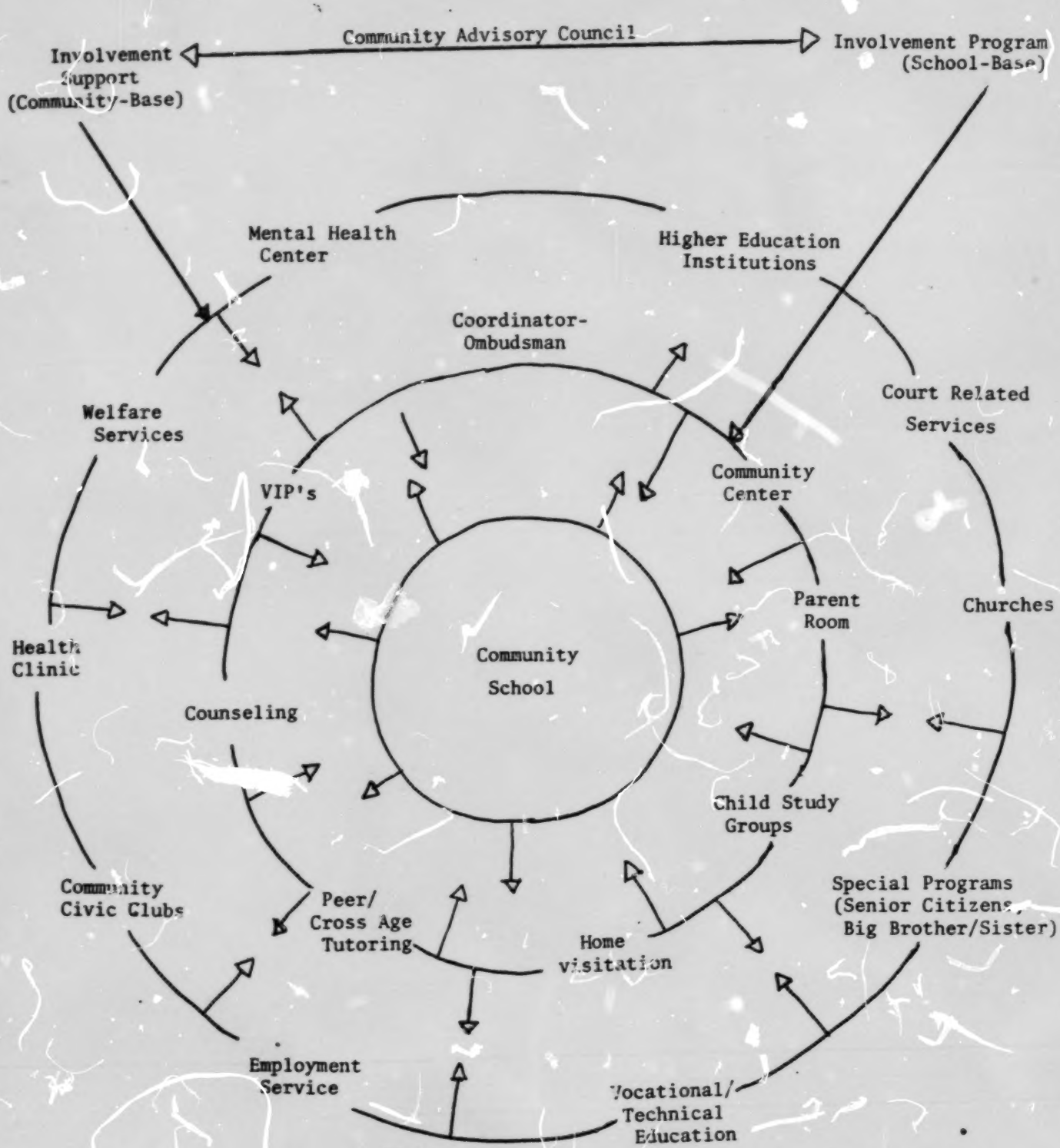
4. Parents will involve themselves most when professional personnel show a genuine respect for the family members as individuals (p. 150).

The Model

The School Community Involvement System (SCIS) model presented in Figure 1 is based on the assumption that through joint concern and understanding, educators, parents and community members will cooperate and together will become more responsive to the needs of children and the needs of society. By involving parents and other community members in active roles working with teachers and students, an understanding of educational objectives and needs would be enhanced. Involvement, as defined by SCIS, incorporates the levels stated by Gordon (1970) and the rights to information and influence suggested by Rowell (1981).

The goal of a true community school is the center of SCIS. The interfaced arrows of the system express openness. The three major components of the model are: (1) Community Advisory Council, (2) Involvement Program (School-Base), and (3) Involvement Support (Community-Base).

School - Community Involvement



Personnel required for the implementation of SCIS are the professional people employed by the school and various community agencies. A Coordinator - Ombudsman should be hired. The paraprofessionals and volunteers trained in the process of implementaing SCIS have the major contribution for the continuation of the program.

Community Advisory Council

A Community Advisory Council (CAC), composed of parents and community members would be established at the outset of the program . The CAC would meet bi-monthly and would participate in interviewing potential volunteers and paraprofessionals. The SCIS Coordinator - Ombudsman will report to the CAC. The CAC would be the final voice of authority in all matters concerning the program and would be involved in the ongoing evaluation of the project.

A vital function of the CAC would be to identify needs and concerns and to make subsequent input into the program. The CAC would become the nucleus for identifying and assuming the leadership responsibility necessary for the maintenance and continuation of SCIS.

Involvement Program

Coordinator-Ombudsman. This person would coordinate the activities of the SCIS sub-components and related personnel and insure that these activities maintain the original focus, community involvement and communication. In addition, a major part of his/her mission would be that of an educational liaison. He/she would assist parents, upon request, in any way possible relative to the educational experience of their youngsters.

Community Center. A Community Center would be developed to provide means for families, school personnel and community members to act together in projects of common interests to their school and community. Activities, not unlike the "pie supper," would encourage the needed concept of the community being involved together.

Activities involving families, school personnel and other community members could include projects in the following categories:

(a) Socio-civic-economic--Establishment of materials, forums and seminars on political and economic concerns and consumer education.

(b) Home and family life--Nutrition workshops, 4-H Club activities, Scouts, and cooking with commodities.

(c) Recreation--Arts and crafts, social events, school plays.

(d) Instructional--Contiruing education courses could be offered as well as basic adult education.

Parent Room. The Parent Room would be a resource room in the school operated by para-professionals and open at stated times, including evening and weekend hours. The Parent Room would have pamphlets, books, slides and film strips chosen for their pertinence to the parents and children of the school.

Employment possiblities, to the extent of earning money for school fees, are limited for many youngsters. One function of the Parent Room would be to establish an "Employment Opportunities Center" for school age youngsters. Civic agencies and private citizens in the surrounding community would be asked to cooperate in this endeavor.

The school counselor(s) would assume responsibility for the training and supervision of the Parent Room Coordinators. Parent Room Coordinators would disseminate information and serve as liaison between family and school and family and community.

Child Study Groups. The general purpose of these study groups would be to help parents understand their children and to develop more effective ways of relating with them. The discussions, therefore, would be directed toward practical applications. Parents would be trained and supervised by the school counselor(s) to lead the study groups. Dinkmeyer and McKay (1976)

have developed Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) that counselors and parents may use as a resource in conducting these groups.

Home Visitation. The Home Visitation component is based upon the premise that behavior, rooted in attitudes and beliefs will change as a consequence of involvement and communication between parents and teachers, thus resulting in a more satisfying and productive school experience for students. Communication Specialist is the title given mothers, fathers or grandparents who have taken part in SCIS training.

The duties of the Communication Specialist would be: (1) improving home-school communication through home visitations, and (2) attempting to help teachers gain an understanding of pupils. Teams consisting of a teacher and a Communication Specialist would be formed for home visitation purposes. The school counselor(s) would train and supervise the Communication Specialists. Shelton and Dobson (1974) describe this component.

Peer/Cross Age

Tutoring. School age youths could be trained to serve as peer tutors and Senior Citizens could be trained to serve as cross age tutors. The training could take place on a higher education campus, at a vocational/technical school or at the Community Center. The Peer/Cross Age Tutors would be supervised by a high school, middle school or elementary teacher and the respective counselor(s). Of course, a teacher should volunteer to use the services of a peer or cross age tutor, for much planning and coordination is needed.

Counseling. School counselors will continue to implement the regular guidance programs in their schools through individual and small group counseling, consulting with parents and teachers, conducting classroom guidance sessions and coordinating services for children and their families.

Special issues of Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, February, 1981 and The School Counselor, January, 1981, are devoted to the area of family counseling and the school counselor.

The school counselor may wish to also establish a peer counseling program based on the assumption that youth are more apt to confide in other youth than adults identified with the school. Peer counselors must receive formal training through a workshop prior to counseling and continued supervision is necessary.

Very Important Persons Group (VIP). Parents and other community members who indicate an interest may, with the help of the counselor, establish a Very Important Persons (VIP) group. This group would volunteer services to teachers, counselors and administrators or school organizations. For example, VIPs could: (1) make presentations on careers, leisure activities or travel; (2) accompany a class on field trips or other excursions; (3) listen to a child read; (4) serve as an aid in class projects; or (5) chaperone at school parties.

The counselor would keep an accurate list of available persons and the areas in which they wish to volunteer their services. Because in many families both parents are now working, the counselor should include senior citizens in the school's VIP group. These older community residents have years of experience, patience and wisdom to offer children, youth and school personnel. (Dobson and Dobson, 1979).

Involvement Support

The support system for the involment program is based within the community. The components of the support system will vary depending upon the size of the community and the types of agencies and programs. Those delineated in the SCIS model are only representative and include institutions of higher education, court related services, churches, special programs (Big Brother/

Sister, Displaced Homemakers, Senior Citizens), vocational/technical schools, employment service, civic clubs, health clinics, welfare services and the mental health center. Services of school age children and their families are diversified though often overlapping.

Based on identified needs, support and coordination would be provided through involvement. The opening of lines of communication between the school and community will be enhanced when involvement is realized.

Implementation

Traditionally, many schools have viewed their function as assuming total responsibility for the educational growth of students and cooperation as a process, whereby, parents and other community members were minimally informed as to the educational growth of children.

Any educator who has participated in innovation will readily recognize that it is one thing to construct theoretical models or "paper programs," but quite another to implement them. There are certain realities unique to any particular school setting, which the alert administrator, counselor and faculty will take into consideration as they begin a community involvement program. The SCIS model is not presented as a panacea for all situations, but simply as a model subject to modification according to the needs of individual communities.

Therefore, four alternative procedures for implementation of a SCIS program are suggested:

1. Slow Implementation - This approach is recommended when certain constraints exist that cause the principal and faculty to deem caution as necessary where innovation is concerned. One or two components could be selected and implemented to test their contribution to the overall school program. This approach has been used successfuly in several school systems

in Oklahoma by initiating Parent Rooms, Child Study Groups, and Home Visitation. If the administrator and faculty are utilizing slow implementation, which reflects caution, they would sincerely want to determine the level at which they are willing to involve the community in the educational program. Inservice workshops for community members and teachers are mandatory.

2. Total Implementation - In utilizing the "total implementation" approach, caution is recommended. To undertake a massive endeavor requires careful planning with and training of community members and faculty. Inservice arrangements need to be made with professionals from higher education. Six months to one year should be spent in preparatory activities prior to total implementation of SCIS.

3. Parent-Teacher Association - This procedure is recommended for schools that have an active Parent-Teacher Association, and an administrator who is capable of delegating or sharing decision-making power. The PTA would assume major responsibility for implementation of the SCIS program. This approach could make use of any one or all three of the other suggested approaches to implementation.

4. Selection - The SCIS model will not, nor was it intended, to fit the needs of all communities. Therefore, this suggested procedure is simply a process of selecting and implementing those components of SCIS that meet immediate needs of the community. Once again, inservice training for community members and teachers is an integral part of the successful implementation of SCIS.

Summary

Many creative administrators, along with their faculties, have developed their own successful strategies for developing school-home-community programs. The SCIS model and suggested alternatives for implementation are not presented as necessarily the only nor the best. However, SCIS is one model that has proved useful in:

1. Presenting a comprehensive systematic program for community involvement and communication in the school experience, and
2. Serving as a guide or catalyst to principals and faculties in either developing or upgrading existing community involvement programs.

In the final analysis, implementation of the SCIS model provides training and experiences for teachers, principals, parents, and community members in involvement and communication skills. However, SCIS is designed as an on-going program, with additional instruction and experiences conducted by those trained during the original period of operation.

If past community programs have not been as successful as they might have been, then it is time to look for alternative models for actively involving parents and community members in the school experience. The SCIS model is one such alternative.

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